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ABSTRACT

An analysis of a televised interview, in Israel, of an actress playing a role in a play is presented as an illustration of politeness marking in modern Israeli Hebrew. The interviewer is well-known as an educated Ashkenazi Jew, the actress a singer well-known for her vocal portrayal of Sephardic Jews, and in this case playing an exaggeratedly stereotyped role of a Sephardic Jewish maid. Analysis focuses on the locally-produced discourse pattern in the interview, and it is assumed that the actress's ethnicity is at the core of the pattern. Use of two words, "yahabla" and "kapara," is closely linked to the ethnic heritage and stereotype of Sephardic Jews, and their contextualizations in this interaction are seen as reflections of speaker-hearer solidarity and the projection onto the actress of certain negative associations. The responses of 55 native Israelis to a tape of the interview are viewed as suggesting that an entertaining but vicious interaction was taking place in it. An English transcription of a segment of the interview and data from the analyses of interpretive filters are appended. (MSE)

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Ethnic Stereotype in Action: A Televised Battle About Social Identity

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For those of you who are counting, I would like to do four things here this morning. First I would like to relate my paper, 'Ethnic stereotype in action: A televised battle about social identity', to the theme of this colloquium. Second, I want to offer to you my interpretation of the late-night TV talk show interview on which my paper is based. Then, I also have the strange desire of wanting to convince you that such an interpretation is both compelling and empirically-accountable. I will try to do this in two ways. That is, third, I will appeal to what we might call the 'internal evidence' of the way in which the text itself unfolds in real-time as support for my own online hypotheses about what is 'going on' in this interaction. And, fourth, I will show you a small example of an appeal to a kind of evidence that we might call 'focused interpretations'. These are interpretations of very specific functional phenomena offered by native Israelis at particular points within this interaction. I hope to show you how both methods serve, in however complex and mediated a fashion, as evidence for the usefulness of the interpretations which I will present to you here this morning.

At this point, however, by way of introduction, I'd simply like to say that I am very excited by our colloquium theme here today as it informs much of the work that I am doing these days. Indeed, my role as 'co-organizer' of this session is not by chance. I believe that the papers being presented here this morning are important and fruitful ways of investigating the discursive uses of language in a speech community.

Theoretical inclinations aside, we are all, in a way, in the business of making claims about how language interacts (or not) with what we often call, really for lack of a better term, 'context' in order to carry relatively regular meanings. And a strange business it is. Our first problem, of course, is that everybody else is in this business as well. We can claim no privileged position, at least not simply by presuming it. And yet, too often I believe, we offer our interpretations of discursive interactions, or 'texts', without worrying about attaching to these interpretations an argument aimed at persuading others of their relative validity, and thus of the uses to which they can be put. Though, we do often worry about such problems at the theoretical level, we need to realize that if we want to claim some form of authoritative voice as 'experts' on the meanings of

language in use, we need to develop methods by which we justify the relevance and usefulness of our own interpretations. After all, medical doctors would never dream of justifying their own medical expertise simply by getting sick.

Perhaps the most amazing aspect of the emergence of meaning from the use of language in social contexts, is that it happens with the degree of relative sharedness that it does. I believe that our job as investigators of this phenomenon is the misleadingly simple task of making the processes involved here explicit. Once explicit, we can then turn to the search for the various ways in which general regularities can be formulated. Today, at the very least, however, we recognize that ideologies are a constituent part of the processes by which individuals arrive at inferences about 'meaning'. That is, it is our job to uncover, and not propose, the ideological bases which bring some regularity to the processes by which meaning 'emerges' in contexts of language use. The first obvious question, then, is which functions of language should we focus upon. Here, again, we have no automatically privileged position. We do what everyone else does. Based on our own interests and concerns -- indeed, even ideologies -- we look at social interactions with respect to certain functional categories of knowledge. Thus, given our own institutional surround, we have often come to focus on, among other related categories, the semiotic signaling involved in types of 'social identity', especially as these relate to the micro-politics of interactions. We now know, however, in this case and in general that in order to understand the semiotic signaling of categories, such as 'gender' and 'ethnicity', for example, we are forced to deal with many other conscious and unconscious 'categories of knowledge' as they become inferentially linked to such signaling both normatively and ideologically. Indeed, if I may mention it here, the upcoming GLS's meetings have organized themselves under the theme of an image of a 'web' or a 'mosaic' of meaning as the complexly interrelated ways in which things cohere in contexts of language use. That, it strikes me, is a very appropriate and useful image. This web or mosaic of often coherent interrelations, however, is a relative one and it is this which has tortured the 'objective' scientists among us. It seems to me, however, that it need not. Today, by appeal to a single in-depth example, I would like to at least suggest how the relativity of signaling relating to such focal categories of interest

need not undermine our efforts to create an empirically-accountable scientific art of appreciation here. That is, I'd like to show that we can account for some of this relative variation in interpretation in terms of the social identity of the 'analyst', be that 'analyst' the 'participant' in some focal interaction or the 'interpreter' of the meaning of some event after the fact. In so doing, I also hope to at least suggest to you that though a category of social identity such as 'ethnicity' does have a partially regular semiotic life within those innumerable mosaics that constitute the 'meanings' of language in use, the semiotic means here are both cultural indices which are internally highly complex processes and not single 'symbols', and interactionally more manipulable in their interactional effects than has often been proposed. Finally, needless to say of course, I do not mean to imply that these are the only ways in which to bring regularity to the process of interpretation. They are, consistent with what I have said above, the ones you would expect me to both look for and 'find' given my own identity as a social scientist of sorts. Alas it is true for us all in dealing with those relative mosaics of meaning which are language in use that you indeed 'have to start somewhere'.

The story of this morning's focal text takes us back to Haifa, Israel, where, during those days of the Gulf War, I was trying to carry out my dissertation research on 'politeness marking in Modern Israeli Hebrew'. One night, relatively early in my stay there, I was watching a late night television interview show and struggling with my Hebrew. Unfortunately these two pursuits of mine were only rarely overlapping and so, simply put, I wasn't exactly understanding what I was watching. About half-way through the show, nevertheless, I experienced what many who have worked in the field have since reported to me as a common experience. I became absolutely convinced that this show was in its very essence, capturing the core meaning of 'politeness' in contemporary Israel. Excited, I called to my roommates, and many signatures and not a small amount of money later, I had a videotape copy of the interview in my hands. Months later during the actual interviewing for my dissertation, I included a viewing of the interview along with focused questions. I then achieved a research result so absolute in its implications that I have never been able to replicate such a result again. It turned out that no human Israeli would connect

anything about the entire interview in any possible way to any notion or concept, direct or indirect, of 'politeness' ... even when I begged them to do so. And yet, in hindsight, as texts go in the world of linguistics, I think I got kind of lucky. Why? Well it turns out -- and I'd be the first to admit that I didn't know this myself the first time I saw it -- that this text is something of a dream come true for those of us who do discourse analysis, of whatever ilk, in institutionalized academic settings. Unlike so many of the texts we analyze for the socio-political relevance of social categories of 'person', such as 'ethnicity' and 'gender', this text is, or at least becomes, quite literally about 'ethnicity'. At least, this is what I hope to convince you of here this morning.

First a bit of cultural background about the interactional event here. The interviewer here, Yaron London (known simply as Y on the transcript in your handout), has a ubiquitous presence on Israeli television. He is also an Ashkenazi Jew--that is, one of European descent--who primarily interviews guests of national interest on his late-night talk-show, entitled 'Weekend'. He is considered to be an ideal speaker of educated Hebrew, and as such, is generally assumed to be highly educated and very intelligent. Moreover, it is of special relevance here that Yaron writes professional theater reviews and thus has a warrant as a theater expert. Attempting to translate him into American terms, we might say that he is, if one can imagine such an 'animal', a sort of Dick Cavett crossed with a Dan Rather. That is, Yaron is also known to be a very 'tough' interviewer.

The interviewee here, Margolit Tsanani (known simply as M on the transcript) is well-known as a contemporary singer/entertainer of "Eastern-style" music -- that is, music typically favored and performed by and for Jews of Sephardic, or North African, ethnic descent. She is herself a native Israeli of Yemenite descent, who epitomizes the popular social stereotype of the direct and aggressive, yet warm and emotional, Sephardi Jew. That is to say, more specifically, in her public persona, and I remind us that that is all most Israelis know, she has set herself up as a performer as an exaggerated example of a dominant stereotype of the Sephardi. That is, she acts, and thus supposedly 'is', rough, aggressive, tough, street-wise, lewd, shocking -- and yet, perhaps the essence of her troubles in this interview -- also warm, truthful and honest. She can be considered, for those of us who still remember our 60s soul music, as a sort of Israeli Millie

Jackson. Of additional significance here is the fact that Margolit has just begun appearing for the first time in her career in the starring role of a 'classic' Israeli play, which was at the time being revived on the equivalent of Israel's 'Broadway'. In this play, entitled 'Eliza Mizrachi', Margolit plays the main character, Eliza, who has the stereotyped job of being a Sephardic maid, working in a rich suburban house. The maid is exaggeratedly stereotyped in a formulaic ritual role-reversal. It is Eliza who ends up solving a complex murder mystery which unfolds in the house in which she works. That is, on at least one plane, the play itself juxtaposes her traditional ways to the problems of modern life, and in general, she comes out as something of a street-wise Sherlock Holmes. Aided by her street knowledge and folk ways she is able to deduce facts and solve problems that the powers that be, with their (overly-determined) professional, educated and bureaucratic ways, are unable to. She is, in effect then, intelligent despite her (social) self. Finally, on this late night talk show -- which although it gets a slightly wider range of types of guests than our own shows in this television genre, essentially speaks to the same function of offering interesting and typically entertaining 'personal' information about the famous and/or (at least) successful -- on this talk show, then, immediately before Margolit's interview, she performs a short act from the play for the studio and television audience.

Let's look then at the transcription of the interview which follows as it is transcribed for you at #1 on the handout -- and note for our purposes here today, we will be referring only to the line numbering to the far left. Now to make the meaning, or better meanings, of this text explicit -- that is, to try to map out the various indexical possibilities that are arguably 'in play' here -- in fact took me over 100 pages of analysis. For today, I want to present you simply with the basic locally-produced poetic pattern that emerges relatively early in this text. Then I want to demonstrate to you how Margolit's ethnicity is at the core of this pattern and then show how this pattern informs some of the relatively isolated segments of the text at later points in the interview. That is to say, I want to show you how it becomes what this interview is 'really about'. These latter segments, however, are the only appeals here today to the 'internal evidence' of which I spoke earlier. Rest assured

though that in the original text, I am very much concerned, perhaps so tediously so as to be even somewhat annoying, with demonstrating, rather than just announcing, these interpretations.

We begin at the start, where quite literally the possibilities for arguments about what is going on here are endless. In hindsight, however, it is surprising how much the very essence of what was going to happen here was present at the very start. Resting on an analysis of the whole, however, we can say that this interaction never really gets the chance in any sense to become a typical television 'interview'. In fact, it becomes an entertaining, yet vicious, interactional war between Margolit and Yaron, which escalates to include name-calling and other insults. Made explicit, the war here is based on Yaron's implicit argument that Margolit is not a good actress, or at least doesn't appropriately belong to the world of acting, based on his discursive attempts to define the 'real' Margolit in negative, ethnically-based stereotypic terms. He thus juxtaposes Margolit's socially presupposed, ethnically-stereotyped attributes as "problematic"--to put it in its most mild possible form--with her new status as an actress. Put crudely, there is contextual evidence that he is saying that she is not a good (legitimate) actress because she "is" a social type whose characteristics contradict with what an actress is presupposed to be. Consequently, much of the interview for Margolit is an attempt -- and often a very creative one given the power relations in place in this context -- to avoid Yaron's incriminating implications. In fact, Margolit consistently responds, except for one two-second slip, to these implicit attempts to define her 'true' self by comically exaggerating their truthfulness. In this way, of course, the attributed characteristics of the 'real Margolit' as socially established in this interaction remain officially 'unknown' and Yaron takes quite an interactional beating in the process. Not only is his argument never able to progress beyond its first step, but given the implications in the air, things between them get, as they say, quite 'ugly'. Let us look at line #3 on your transcript to see how all of this gets underway.

There are for our purposes here today, two significant semiotic elements in this first utterance. Yaron begins by mentioning two words, 'yahabla' and 'kapara' which had appeared in Margolit's just finished performance of a short act from the play. Their lack of appearance in the 60s version of the play is the "theme" of this section and, in fact, the words themselves are the

strict linguistic topic of discourse throughout this section. In line #3, then, it is of course possible that Yaron is simply concerned with the fact that the words yahabla (crazy nut) and kapara (cutie) are new additions to a recently revived version of a play. Both of these lexical items, however, also function as emblems of the stereotypic Sephardi Jew -- that is to say of Margolit the real person and even more so of Margolit the social persona. These words regularly function to bring together in the instance many of the traits that can be shown by independent means to be core stereotypic traits of the Sephardi Jew. Though somewhat dated today and linked with a completely different pragmatic function, compare the strength of association between our own 'far out' and the social role of 'the hippie'. Returning to the case at hand, though, both words regularly presuppose their historic roots in Arabic. They are members of an opposing register because they are, as they say, "Arabic" words as opposed to "pure Hebrew" ones. Thus, both words index the general history of descent of the social group that stereotypically uses them and that is emblematically marked by them. Though both words index a certain emotional directness in their speaker, they are open to different groundings. The former typically presupposes the speaker's anger at the other and the latter presupposes the speaker's warm affection for the other. Both then are consistent with the stereotypic emotionality of the Sephardi. How to evaluate these groundings, however, emerges as an issue in the present interview. As we will see, whether or not directness as a stereotypic Sephardic mode of speaking should be grounded as a rude, overly emotional, attack or as an emotionally warm display of affection and honesty is of central importance in all that follows. Crucially, both yahabla (crazy nut) and kapara (cutie) are capable of being grounded in the more positive light. Their differing contextualizations relate to the co-occurring presence or absence of speaker-hearer solidarity. If used with appropriate role sets--whose inhabitants adhere to a positive evaluation of such "direct speech"--even the attacking emotional honesty of yahabla can be interpreted positively as a sign of speaker honesty and respect for the other. It can, and often is, endearing. In the present context, however, to the extent that such signs are potential indexes of Margolit as a social type, their contextually negotiated evaluation has crucial implicational consequences for what is (possibly) being indexically projected on to Margolit herself. These other

traits, then, form a whole series of potentially negative associations which, as we noted, are potentially being projected on to Margolit. Such character associations, mentioned earlier, include lewdness, toughness, directness, vulgarity and inappropriate emotional honesty.

Returning to line #3, more generally, note how Yaron seems to be using a declarative sentence, considered from one functional perspective, to announce a true statement of fact for Margolit to either reject or accept, considered from another functional perspective. That is, Yaron proposes that these words were not in the original version of the play. And yet, as we bring in more of the cultural context, this is functionally somewhat problematic because it is blatantly obvious. Yaron, Margolit and the members of the audience are all aware of this fact at some level because, if for no other reason, such speech 'emblems' could not yet have formed in the 1960s, when this play was originally written. Note, in addition, however, how the overall utterance in line #3 is also presupposedly delivered by an interviewer to an interviewee in the context of an ongoing interview. One typically presupposes a coherent flow to the content and ordering of these parts. As such, it is assumed to form the first part in an interviewer's typical attempt to lead somewhere with, what we call in our own terms, a "line of questioning". By the end of line #3, we would offer the functional hypothesis that Yaron seems to want Margolit to give her personal confirmation of a fact in order to set up a related series of questions. Where, though, does he want to go? Well in the face of his mentioning of those two Sephardic lexical emblems and the traits that they potentially project on to Margolit, it appears as if, at the very least, Margolit has some justifiable fears.

Consider line #5. Margolit apparently senses that any clear display of a lack of agreement would be (minimally) an inappropriate barrier to the logic of Yaron's questioning and thus a normative break with the rights of his role as interviewer. Yet, she is arguably sensitive to the still ambiguous functioning of the emblems that are at the focus of his claim. Indeed, note how in line #4, Margolit laughs nervously right after Yaron fronts the contextually ambiguous emblems in order to topicalize them. She is, it is being argued here, already suspicious of their implications as units in Yaron's broader line of questioning. Thus, though Margolit responds to the normative

pressure created by the utterance, she responds to a request for confirmation in a way that we would expect. She avoids giving her personal confirmation of Yaron's claim. Her perhaps in line #5 allows an acceptance of the objective truth of the claim. As such it poses no threat to Yaron's social rights as interviewer. At the same time, of course, she has held back her own personal conformation of this fact. Unaware of where Yaron is leading, yet entertaining particular suspicions, Margolit has carefully distanced herself from the potential argument structure.

Things have begun to take shape. In lines #6-7, Yaron parenthetically juxtaposes his personal belief in the fact offered for confirmation in line #3 to Margolit's personal uncertainty. The next three utterances there form a "logical" link with the previous one. Though they too count as "claims", they also reach back to (index) the previous discourse. They function as "explanations" that attempt to prove the objective facticity of Yaron's earlier 'claim'. Recalling that such a claim was assumed to be objectively obvious, it can now be safely assumed that Margolit's personal acceptance of the proposed fact was and still is crucial to Yaron's line of questioning. That Yaron continues on in his effort to persuade Margolit and to obtain her personal confirmation is relative evidence that his as yet unrevealed argument structure requires it. This, I would suggest, is precisely the type of evidence that leads Margolit to remain suspicious. From (at least) her perspective, then, Yaron is still trying to do 'the same thing'. And, indeed, Margolit participates in this locally-produced poetic structure by again doing 'the same thing' that she had done before. In line #8, she again distances herself from a personal confirmation. Her appended apparently seems to say (yet again), 'Though I defer to your knowledge and this may in fact be the case, it isn't clear to me personally'. The following topic change seemingly ends Yaron's attempt to obtain a personal confirmation from Margolit.

Though there is a new topic of discourse, beginning in line #9, we should be careful not to assume that something 'new' has arrived. As discussed earlier, though Yaron may have 'only' been referentially attributing a 'newness' to a few lexical items in a revived play, he was also potentially projecting certain attributes on to Margolit. The ambiguity was whether such lexical emblems indexed the stereotypic attributes of Margolit herself or merely acted as referential material

in a line of questioning unrelated to Margolit. Note now how Yaron opens in line #8 by attributing a 'new' (first) and dramatic role to Margolit. The ambiguity is now in danger of being resolved in an unflattering way for Margolit. Recalling that Margolit's earlier responses were interpreted as suspicions of Yaron's potential line of questioning, it would appear that at least for Margolit, Yaron's making her the new "topic" bears out a part of the (potential) coherence that she has been entertaining to this point in the interview. As she suspected, it now appears that Yaron really had been talking about her all along. The 'real Margolit' (as opposed to the role she plays) has now become the explicit topic of discourse. Similarly, and crucially at the same time, Yaron implicitly attributes to her characteristics that, by stereotypic reasoning, contradict with the ones that it now appears he really had intended to project on to her earlier. There is thus a parallelism between these two moments in real-time that allows Margolit to infer that Yaron seems to be challenging her new status as a 'dramatic' actress by relying on presupppsedly stereotypic and ethnically-based traits. Thus, there is now contextual evidence for Margolit's earlier fears.

It is important to realize, at this point, that such a regimentation does not emerge because it is explicitly stated, or even asked, by Yaron -- that is, for example, in a question such as, 'Being Sephardi, do you think that it is possible or appropriate for you to be a (serious) actress?'. Rather it is inferred by the complex semiotic process outlined above. The objects of instantiated regularities in conjunction with other presupposed types of (extra-linguistic) knowledge have been molded by a real-time (iconic) parallelism into a coherent organization that juxtaposes referential material into an argument about what has been happening. To this point, the only retrievable referential material in this reconstructed and incriminating juxtaposition is the type of person who says yahabla and kapara and the type of person who plays dramatic roles (minimally, by semantic definition, a 'legitimate actress'). Other extensions, of course, are by various degrees of indexical strength presupposable. Indeed, as we will now see, the cards have largely been dealt in terms of what is going on here. The rest of the interview has us watching many of these ideas become explicit.

Note, then, how the main poetic pattern of this interview is completed now for the first time. In line #10, Margolit adds to or plays out the parallelism by again distancing herself from the

increasingly clear and negative implications of such a loaded question. Being about herself, however, she can't hold back a personal confirmation of the fact implied in the question as she did earlier. She is now too obviously "in the know". Thus, she foregrounds the very presuppositions grounding the argument that she assumes Yaron is implicitly making. By repeating dramatic with a slow, stressed, and thus exaggerated, intonation (and a visible look of mock surprise), she holds up the indexical presuppositions that surround the word against the social presuppositions that surround her own public persona as an entertainer. That is, she goes 'into character' in order to reject the pragmatic implications of the adjective as applied to herself. These segments elicit audience laughter precisely because, as she is well aware, the audience is also willing to categorize her with stereotypic attributes that contradict with those of a dramatic actress. Indeed, such traits are a presupposed part of her public persona and she appeals to this side of her identity many times to escape the personal implications of Yaron's line of questioning. Following that, in a somewhat more serious tone, she describes Yaron's now 'funny' mistake as an "exaggeration".

Briefly, note then, how in line #12, Yaron returns to form and again asks 'the same thing'. Whereas earlier, Yaron offered 'explanations', now he 'asks' what is by definition logically implied: if it is Margolit's first time in the theater, then the role she is playing is her first dramatic one. Again, such 'yes-no questions' are obvious in this context and this problematic presupposition can only be coherently integrated by again assuming that such forms are parts in some more extended line of questioning. That is to say, he asks her to confirm personally a fact about herself which is obvious to all present and which again contradicts with her known public persona. By now, however, Margolit has seen Yaron ignore her subtle test of his intentions and return to his now ever-more dangerous line of questioning. For Margolit, needless to say, Yaron has returned to his old form (and function!). As a result, note how Margolit feels the need to ignore the relative normative pressures to respond to Yaron's only seemingly new request for confirmation. Given the parallelism, she is faced with the same problem she encountered earlier. She can't hold back confirmation because she is too obviously 'in the know', but she still does not want to play into the logic of Yaron's argument. As a result, in line #13, she simply returns to his

earlier form of the same question in line #9. Margolit offers her first of a few relatively serious attempts to respond to the implicit question. Dramatic for Margolit is corrected to comic. That her role is potentially both comic and dramatic by the normative implications of Hebrew semantics is not at issue. Crucially, comic, unlike dramatic, is not a trait that opposes or contradicts with any traits, recalling the opening emblems, associated with her "Sephardiness". Such a trait is also consistent with her public persona and thus theoretically, at least, should neutralize Yaron's implicit argument. Needless to say, at this point, Margolit has presented Yaron with a somewhat compelling 'request' to reveal his implicit argument structure. That is to say that Yaron should feel a certain amount of pressure to withdraw, or rephrase, or even to reveal a different argument altogether. Here and elsewhere, despite the personal nature of Yaron's attacks, Margolit's attempts to test for and even avoid his line of questioning remain ironically, yet often brilliantly, indirect, and thus respectful of his socially presupposed rights to a relatively higher social status than hers.

In line #15, many of the hypotheses discussed above finally become explicit. Yaron draws an ambiguous, yet revealing, conclusion from all that has preceded. He sets up a comparison between Margolit and her role. Here, then, the previously implicit 'real' Margolit as opposed to her public persona becomes explicit. Indeed, he is in the midst of supplying the crucial qualifier that will make clear the basis of the comparison between the real Margolit and her 'new' role, when Margolit interrupts him. On one hand, Yaron's comparison could be based on a more local, less implicationally clear, indexical link. He could be saying that both Margolit and the character she plays are comic, i.e., funny. On the other, of course, it could be interpreted as revealing a crucial presupposition of the line of questioning that Margolit has been assuming all along -- that is, that the real Margolit, like the role that she is now playing, is characterizable as an overly-determined, stereotypic Sephardi, and thus, either she isn't really acting at all and/or she lacks the presupposed traits to be do so. Pushing the ambiguity in Yaron's intention to the side for a moment, it is clear that Margolit assumes the latter grounding and reacts by interrupting Yaron's questioning.

In line #16, Margolit, if you will, inhabits her hypothesis. She responds in a way that presupposes that the original emblems referred to her. She brilliantly rejects Yaron's proposed

comparison by claiming that she--note personally--wouldn't use the word yahabla in a context that she explicitly describes and which would normatively count as a rude example of its use. Such an utterance, it becomes clear, is the set-up to the joke which follows in line #18. She describes the context of such direct use inappropriately. No one would use such an emblem "all the time" and "to everyone" who irritated them. This description, though crucial to the joke that it sets up, also lacks precisely the presupposed solidarity among interactants that, as mentioned above, remains important to an understanding of the style and, by implication, to an evaluation of those who use it. Immediately after hearing the first part of her interpretation of the comparison, Yaron, in line #7, fills in a brief pause by muttering that this was not his intention. His serious answer emerges because he is not yet aware that Margolit's utterance also functions as the set up of a joke that runs from a potentially dangerous presupposition through a humorously exaggerated and thus distancing agreement.

Though clearly aiming for a laugh and allowing herself to hide behind her social persona as comic entertainer/singer, Margolit's 'joke' in lines #16 and 18 also foreground precisely the stereotypic attributions that she has an increasingly justified reason to believe that Yaron is attempting to attribute to her. At once a comic performance for the audience that distances the "real" Margolit (vs. the performer) from the 'logic' of Yaron's implicit argument, it is also a subtly foregrounded test of Yaron's intentions--whether or not Margolit consciously intends it as such. To get the 'joke', Yaron and the audience have to recreate the very presuppositions that seem to be involved in Margolit's understanding of Yaron's implicit line of questioning. The joke thus (potentially) informs Yaron that Margolit is aware of 'where he is trying to go with all of this'. By again distancing herself from the terms of his argument, one might even infer that Margolit is trying to tell him that she does not want to move in this direction. Thus, the beautifully overlapped construction of lines #16 and 18 -- as at least joke, test and warning -- allow Margolit, in relative interactional safety, to test her seeming hypothesis that Yaron is using a social stereotype to bring her acting ability into question.

Thus, the basic poetic pattern for this interaction, which I wanted to establish for you here today, has been created 'online'. Yaron will continually attempt to get Margolit to accept her ethnically-based nature and Margolit will continually, and often very creatively, distance herself from a serious personal confirmation by playing off her widely-known public persona and thus jokingly exaggerating 'how bad she really is'. As I stressed in my opening remarks, however, we are still left with a very important analytical question, 'Is this interpretation true?' -- or better, in what ways does it help us to account for the shape and meaning of this interaction as a whole. As I have discussed, let me now make two distinct attempts to demonstrate to you that this interpretation about 'what is going on here' can be empirically supported.

First, the pattern established above repeatedly informs both Margolit's and Yaron's participation in this interaction. The rest of the interview becomes a sort of naturally-occurring 'internal evidence' for the story to this point. That is to say that this poetic pattern becomes a presupposed 'fact' which informs later discourse here. Indeed, especially near the end of the interview, as Yaron realizes that Margolit will never allow him to get his argument moving, he begins to make many of these interpretive assumptions explicit. He begins to insult Margolit in relatively isolated, but predictably consistent, ways. Similarly, we find both Yaron and Margolit making seemingly unrelated utterances, which are in fact critical meta-comments about their respective behaviors in the ongoing interview. Here, too, we find that much of the implicit material for the interpretations above is made explicit. And, though does not permit us to work through it, I urge you all to read through this transcript with this in mind, as, if nothing else, it really does become quite a vicious, yet densely entertaining, cultural performance.

In lieu of the full story, consider a few isolated examples. Consdier line #68. Yaron, though seemingly complimenting Margolit on her ability to control herself, attributes to her the characteristic of being 'tame enough'. Here, then, he plays off an indexical link that relates to the semantic noun-phrase classes normally described by the Hebrew word for tame. That is to say, much as the implication runs in English, Margolit has been linguistically transformed here into a 'wild animal'. Recall that such an attribution, from another perspective, is consistent with the set of

attributes that Yaron has been attempting to set up and use to describe the 'real', stereotypically understood, Margolit. If we recall the earlier line #53, which set much of this in motion, though she may be sufficiently 'tame', she nevertheless, in the locally-produced relevant oppositional structure here, is not professionally 'disciplined'.

Consider, too, lines #60 and 61. Semiotically similar, recall, to what Margolit had done to herself very early on in the interview with respect to the word 'dramatic', Yaron, in line #60, intonationally 'holds up' one of the professional, educated words that Margolit had subtly slipped into her own narrative as perhaps yet another attempt to escape from his implicit argument. Yaron thus displays a not so sincere mock surprise at the presupposable contradictions between those types of speaker typically associated with the use of the word and Margolit's presupposed traits as a social being. The same tension between the real Margolit and her social persona is again present and, indeed, yet again, she escapes the implications in line #61 in her now established way. For our purposes here, however, note how such a 'mock' question achieves in a single move what it has been hypothesized that Yaron has been trying to achieve through the more elaborate constructions of his earlier lines of questioning. Compare line #83, where semiotically speaking, Yaron does the same thing again. Note, there, the ever-so-brief lapse by Margolit. In the middle of line #85, for a split second, Margolit seemingly sincerely allows herself to be hurt by the indexical implications and offers the beginning of a defense of her actual intelligence. However, literally seconds later, as you can see, she is back in comic form as a High School degree in Israel, much as here, is not socially assumed to indicate intelligence.

Finally, consider lines #76 through 79. In line #76, Yaron opens with what appears to be his first innocent and sincere 'yes-no question' of the entire interview. That is to say, for perhaps the first time, neither Yaron nor the audience know the answer. And yet, closer inspection in the face of all that has happened to here shows us -- and certainly Margolit! -- that it is another 'loaded' question. In asking Margolit if she has ever seen Edna Fliedel's portrayal of Eliza Mizrachi, Yaron is doing much more than asking her for a yes or no answer. All in the audience know Edna Fliedel to be a very famous, talented and Ashkanezi actress. She is herself one of the central examples

available to Israelis of a 'classic' theater actress -- with all the culturally-positive values inscribed therein. As such, of course, her very name here indexes a whole set of oppositions that have had relevance for the ongoing interview. Edna Fliedel is the legitimate actress that Margolit, by stereotypic presupposition, is not. Indeed, the indexical links are so culturally coherent and dense that it is difficult to argue (here) that Yaron could be unaware of them or that Margolit could interpret them any other way. Indeed, Margolit responds to precisely this functional aspect.

In lines #78 and 79, she answers 'no' by informing us that she never saw Edna Fliedel in the role. She then goes on beyond these particular utterances to offer exaggerated praise for Edna. Note then how she again accepts the assumptions that are potentially being used against her, but here not as a set up to a joke, but, skipping ahead to line #95, rather as proof that even with such a presupposedly great 'actress', she has formed a close friendship. It would appear, then -- if you know what I mean ... nudge, nudge, wink, wink -- that Margolit is not so new to the world of acting after all and indeed, by now we all now what she means. Rather than refining the terms of the trope or trying to comically escape from them, as we have previously talked about, Margolit now seems to be trying to disprove them. Not too surprisingly, however, this story, are the interactional effort that it represents, is told primarily for the audience's benefit. Yaron has all but stopped participating in the interview. Indeed, Margolit's attempts to establish this fact are consistently, and disruptively, undermined by Yaron. Consider line #79 as one particularly pointed example here. Yaron points out that Edna Fliedel is ethnically Ashkenazi. The significance of such a 'fact' in this context should be clear to all of us now. That is, the ethnic basis of Yaron's attempted characterization of Margolit and its relevance to her acting ability is now made explicit. Note, how obvious the implications are for Margolit. She totally ignores it in line #80 and simply returns to her own story -- itself a continuing effort on her part to undermine the relevance of such an idea.

As one final attempt to convince you of the usefulness of the above interpretation, consider #2 on the handout. When I had a group of 55 native Israelis watch this particular interview and then talk to me, through a series of 'focused interpretations', about what it was about, I learned

that all accepted in one form or another that there was something of an entertaining, but vicious, interactional war took place here. Differences in their interpretations emerged, however, with respect to 'who won this war'. Just as an example, I want to play for you the relevant video segment from the interview for one of these moments of 'focused interpretation'. You can look at line #18, where this instance is taken from, but you don't really need the Hebrew here, especially as we've already walked through much of the interview. I will play it twice and all I want you to do is at the point that I note to you -- right after the 'but' in line #18 -- make an inference, based on Margolit's facial expression, about her emotional state at that moment. Is she happy, upset, calm, confused, etc.

[PLAY VIDEO SEGMENT]

Arguably all of the informants believed Margolit at that moment to be either 'embarrassed', 'nervous' or 'angry'. Looking at #2 on the handout, look at Table 1.1. If we control those interpretations for the gender of the interpreter, we see that the males split evenly, but that the females have a slight preference for seeing her as 'embarrassed'. The differences here, however, don't seem to be too significant. Let's now move down to Table 1.2. When we cross these focused interpretations with the ethnicity of the interpreter, we begin to see a more significant pattern. Sephardic interpreters seem to split between seeing Margolit as either embarrassed or angry, whereas Ashkenazi interpreters tend to see her as nervous. Finally, moving down to tables Table 1.3 and 1.4, notice what happens when we control for the interpreter's gender and ethnicity. Sephardis, and more typically the females, were more often 'embarrassed' by what they saw and they seem to have projected this state into Margolit. After hearing what they had to say, no matter how many times I tried to show them how arguably 'creative' Margolit's uses of 'vulgar' speech were, I was ideologically 'taught' -- often sympathetically because I was a dumb American who just didn't get it -- that she was a disgrace to herself, to Sephardic people and particularly to Sephardic women. In short, Margolit, they believed, didn't know how to act properly and that she

should have known better. The other competing pattern, inhabited by both Sephardic men and women, is more in line with the interpretation offered here today. Margolit is considered to be mad because, as I was told many times, Yaron London was and still is a racist jerk, who was attacking for being Sephardic. Finally, note, the pattern for Ashkenazis. In almost every case, this interview and our discussions about it made them visibly awkward. One can understand their uncomfortableness -- and its projection into Margolit -- once one realizes the strength of the ideology of equality that informs all talk about 'differences' between ethnic groups in contemporary Israel. Simply put, to judge Margolit to be inappropriate is to criticize a stereotypically-determined Sephardic mode of behavior. To see her as angry, however, is to admit that there is ethnic prejudice in contemporary Israel. Overwhelmingly, both male and female Ashkenazis chose not to commit to either of these options. Here, they often reported to me that 'ethnic relations' in Israel were very complicated and that the situation was far from clear. If not this, I was then taught -- often without even asking! -- that all of this business about ethnicity was nonsense. Everybody was 'just' Israeli.

Well, I discovered this type of pattern in similar 'focused interpretations' time and time again. To summarize the point here, I'd like to suggest that we can go far in our attempts to account for regular cultural patterns of interpretation of language in use by realizing that, quite often, people -- aided by ideological patterns of representation which they are selectively recruited to -- see only themselves in the texts they interpret. Additionally, on the assumption that this text is in no particular way 'exceptional' -- and I don't believe that it is -- allow me to at least suggest that the life of ethnicity as it is relevant to the meaning of language in use is far more internally complex and manipulable than perhaps many of us imagine.

Let me conclude here with a final postscript to the story that I have told you here today. Soon after this focal event a very interesting thing occurred. It is one that I offer you in closing as a humbling lesson to those of us who start to believe that foreseeing and predicting cultural patterns is easy. Surrounded by an ideological war, similar to one here in the States, about ethnic bias in the institutionalized mass media in Israel, and as I said not too long after the interview we looked at

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today, Margolit Tsanani -- Sephardic singer/entertainer/actress -- got her own late-night talk show. And, as I hear from sources in Israel -- and perhaps this we could have seen coming -- there is an uproar in the mass media from Sephardic Jews, who are split over whether or not her show is great or represents an embarrassment to her 'people'! ... Only'time will tell, I suppose, but my hunch is that both true, and systematically so ... right now. Thank You.

Ethnic stereotype in action:
A televised battle about social identity

Annual Conference of the American Association of Applied Linguistics
Chicago, 3/24/96
Douglas J. Glick
Vassar College

HANDOUT

1. focal text

1	A1	Y:	Mrs. Tsanani.
2	A1'	M:	Yes.
3	A2	Y:	(Crazy) 'nut' and 'cute' ... These words weren't in the 60s version.
4			(Margolit laughs nervously)
5	A2'	M:	No...perhaps not.
6	A3	Y:	I don't think so. We didn't understand them then. Those words hadn't become ... They weren't widely
7			known in the public.
8	A3'	M:	No, no they weren't widely known in the public ... apparently.
9	B1	Y:	Is this your first dramatic role?
10	B1'	M:	Dramatic!? You've exaggerated.
11			(Yaron, Margolit and A laugh)
12	B2	Y:	Is this the first time that you are working in the theater?
13	B1"	M:	It's a comic role.
14	B1"'	Y:	Is it?
15	C1	Y:	You're not much different from your ... role?
16	C1'	M:	Ah, no I don't think that I say at every opportunity and to everyone that annoys me, 'you crazy nut'.
17	C1"	Y:	Sure, that isn't what I meant.
18	C1'	M:	No, I have much more shocking words in my vocabulary, but ...
19			(weak A laughter)
20	C2	Y:	But your direct approach is a temperament that is pretty 'Tsanani'.
21	C2'	M:	Very Tsanani.
22	D1	Y:	Yes... and this is also the first time that you are working with actors. In other words, you need to
23			create relations with them. That is to say you need ...
24	D1'	M:	Look,
25	D1	Y:	to shut your mouth sometimes in order to let others ...
26	E1	M:	You probably ... you probably want to ask me, what happened, how is it that you (are) all of a sudden
27	E2	Y:	If you want to ask the questions and to give the answers, please (go right ahead).

(Margolit and A laughter)

E2' M: Don't get angry cutie, I'm not … I'm crazy about you.

E2" Y: No, you nut, it's OK.

(A laughter continues and turns into applause)

E3 M: (Little) Yaron, Yaron, be good to me and I'll be good to you.

(Margolit raises finger in mock threat)

E3' Y: OK, OK

E3 M: (but) be bad to me (and…)

(quiet, awkward moment, Margolit laughs nervously)

F1 Y: (Yaron picks up his cup) Cheers. (Yaron takes a drink)

F1' M: Cheers.

G1 M: They asked me… Some smart one asked me …

G2 Y: So, what is the question that I asked?

G2' M: I'll tell you what to ask. Do you want me to?

(Margolit laughing throughout) (Yaron nods)

G1 M: Ask me, for example, how did all of this happen to you so suddenly?

G2" Y: So, it is asked.

G1" M: Well I'll tell you about it… I'll tell you… Everyone asks me, how is it that you are suddenly going to act? "It's so sudden" (they say) … I'll tell you why… I'm actually not far from what I do. That means when I sing, I'm acting. If I was for example a surgeon at Belenson (hospital) and you asked me about suddenly playing Eliza Mizrachi, this would be a wonderful question, but that one isn't. To promote myself, I'm saying it about myself.

G3 Y: What's my next question?

G3' M: Whatever you want.

I1 Y: And this actually leads us to the opening and also the closing question. Now you have to be disciplined. There isn't room for improvisations. There is *mistansiena* [unknown technical word from the world of acting]. The director Sashon Gabai …

I2 M: Just pronouncing this word is hard for me. I'm always saying *mistintsena*, *mistintsena* [NB: these are mispronunciations]. I don't even understand the word. But actually… Director Sashon Gabai has to keep me busy training because I have "bad habits" [said in English], what are called bad habits as a singer. I sing into the microphone and I hide myself behind it. I do things with it… and the cord … suddenly I have to face front and do "takes" [said in English], so that …

I3 Y: Did you say "takes"?

I3' M: Yes, I said it and didn't make a mistake. Did you see? Great, it just came out for me.

(Yaron & A laughs)

63			The truth is actually… that what I want to express in the show, 'Eliza Mizrachi', is my almost
64			instinctive comic talent. I really love to talk. You can certainly see that … I'm not letting you say a
65			word… You don't mind?
66	I5'	Y:	No
67	I3'	M:	You're not angry?
68	I5'	Y:	No, I noticed that … that you are 'tame' enough.
69			(A laughter)
70	I5"	M:	Tame enough!, what did you think that I would do to you?
71			(Yaron visibly embarrassed + audience laughter)
72	J1	M:	I don't know what they expect from me all the time. But you know what they told me. If Yaron digs
73			into you, dig into him. I don't know why everybody told me that…They told me that Yaron will
74			certainly mow you down. I said "no", he's a cutie, he's crazy for me, I know that he's hot for me.
75			(A laughter & Yaron visibly embarrassed)
76	K1	Y:	Tell me, Margalit, did you see Edna Fliedel in this role?
77	K1'	M:	No I didn't see Edna Fliedel. I don't think that it's worth it for me. (She's) a simply exceptional actress.
78			Maybe it would be worth it to learn but…
79	K2	Y:	It's worth it to learn how to act Eastern (Sephardi)! … She's Polish, you know
80	K1'	M:	But I could get embarrassed by her. She could… Maybe she'll frustrate me cause she is
81			so very good that maybe it's not worth it for me to see her. Who knows. I'm crazy about Edna Fliedel
82			and a year ago, look at the strange "coincidence" [said in English]…
83	K3	Y:	Did you say "coincidence"?
84			(A laughter)
85	K3'	M:	I did say "coincidence". I'm intelligent, don't see me… I have a H.S. diploma.
86			(A & Yaron laughter continues throughout)
87	K1'	M:	A year ago there was a really frightening play on television in which she stared. And what they have
88			tried to teach me for thirty some years about our frightening heritage (the holocaust), in one play I
89			understood amazing things and I called her…
90	K4	Y:	This was the play by Savir Lubrect and Eliza Olmert?
91	K4'	M:	Yes, exactly.
92	K1'	M:	And I was simply so frightened, so amazed and excited first of all from her great power as an actress and
93			because she acted so very …
94	K5	Y:	So, on opening night, she'll certainly be sitting in the first row.
95	K1'	M:	I called her to tell her that she is great. I spoke with her husband and now we are also good friends. So,
96			look at that, how life turns out.
97	K6	M:	Don't you see it? …Tell me that you see it.
98	K6'	Y:	Amazing.

2. Interpretive 'filters': ethnicity and gender

Table 1.1: Gender x Interpretation

	Embarrassed	Nervous	Angry	TOTALS
Male	9 (33.3%)	9 (33.3%)	9 (33.3%)	27
Female	13 (46.4%)	7 (25.0%)	8 (28.6%)	28
TOTALS	22	16	17	55

Table 1.2: Ethnicity x Interpretation

	Embarrassed	Nervous	Angry	TOTALS
Sephardic	22 (52.4%)	5 (11.9%)	15 (35.7%)	42
Ashkenazi	0 -	11 (84.6%)	2 (15.4%)	13
TOTALS	22	16	17	55

Table 1.3: Ethnicity x Interpretation for FEMALE

	Embarrassed	Nervous	Angry	TOTALS
Sephardic	13 (59.1%)	2 (9.1%)	7 (31.8%)	22
Ashkenazi	0 -	5 (83.3%)	1 (16.7%)	6
TOTALS	13	7	8	28

Table 1.4: Ethnicity x Interpretation for MALE

	Embarrassed	Nervous	Angry	TOTALS
Sephardic	9 (45.0%)	3 (15.0%)	8 (40.0%)	20
Ashkenazi	0 -	6 (85.7%)	1 (14.3%)	7
TOTALS	9	9	9	27

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